

February 7, 2012



To Whom it May Concern:

The Maple Leaf Community Council Executive Board is elected to represent the nearly 4,000 homes and businesses in the Maple Leaf neighborhood of north Seattle. We are writing today concerning transportation improvements and proposed developments for the Northgate Urban Center. The Northgate Urban Center (green outlined area on the attached map) includes part of northwestern Maple Leaf, and how this area is developed will have direct impacts on the quality of life for Maple Leaf residents.

We have three goals in participating in the coming multi-jurisdictional process:

First, we wish to ensure sufficient development takes place within the Northgate Urban Center to fulfill the decades-old agreement between neighborhoods and City Hall that Seattle would accommodate residential and employment growth within designated urban centers to reduce the impacts of growth on traditionally single-family areas of our city. We believe aggressive upzoning in the Northgate Urban Center accompanied by commensurate infrastructure improvements are important to achieve this goal. LINK light rail's arrival in 2021 provides important transportation infrastructure – the lack of which has been a barrier to growth in the Northgate Urban Center for some time and a key reason for Maple Leaf's historical opposition to additional upzoning in the area.

Second, we wish to ensure changes coming to the Northgate Urban Center benefits residents and businesses within the Northgate Urban Center *and* the rest of the Maple Leaf neighborhood. We want to ensure these benefits are available to people of all incomes. We want to ensure the changes are done in a way that respects the unique aspects of the environment. Finally, we want to ensure minimization of negative impacts these changes will have in the short, medium, and long term. We see all of this as components of what we like to call "Community-Oriented Transit Development."

Third, we want make certain the Maple Leaf Community Council will be engaged during this process. Our inclusion as well as inclusion of other community groups is essential to the process having any chance at real success. Decisions made on various development and transportation projects in the Northgate Urban Center have a disproportionate impact on Maple Leaf. This is due to proximity, street grid design, and Maple Leaf's geography. We continually gather input and educate our community members through our hand-delivered newsletter, email outreach system, and our quarterly General Meetings. We are undertaking this significant effort so the entire neighborhood can be informed participants in the coming development of the Northgate Urban Center.

To facilitate this involvement, please add our mailing address (shown above) and the email address "northgate@MapleLeafCommunity.org" to your organization's official notification process for all projects taking place within the Northgate Urban Center.

While we see the two as inextricably linked, we have organized our comments into “Land Use” and “Transportation” subcategories below to increase readability of this admittedly long communication.

Land use issues

The Northgate Urban Center is already slated to receive considerable development. Current zoning actually exceeds the area’s 2024 residential and employment targets. Various new proposals all contemplate some sort of upzones above even the currently existing excess zoning capacity. **Provided** future “upzoned buildings” are suitably located, properly designed, adequately mitigated, and contain provisions for low income residents, the Maple Leaf Community Council considers recent upzone proposals to be inadequate given their proximity to the Northgate LINK light rail station and the Northgate Transit Center.

We outline below considerations we believe necessary in order to achieve significant additional residential and employment zoning capacity *above current plans* in the Northgate Urban Center. With the considerations we outline below in place, we believe additional zoned capacity is possible without damaging quality of life for residents in the Northgate Urban Center and the Maple Leaf neighborhood.

Comprehensive area planning required

Project planning for the Northgate Urban Center is currently happening piecemeal. An ongoing effort concluding with a Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD) proposal in 2009 for a widespread rezone was a good start with a contract rezone recommendation endorsed by the Maple Leaf Community Council Executive Board. DPD’s 2009 proposal covered the “Proposed Northgate Study Areas” outlined in red on the attached map. We continue to strongly support DPD’s 2009 contract rezone proposal, although we believe certain sections should be more aggressively upzoned for additional residential and employment capacity.

King County is planning significant development around the LINK station. Sound Transit, King County, and the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) are making decisions about transportation and parking infrastructure in the Northgate Urban Center. Property owners outside the Northgate Study Area are certain to want upzones for their properties as well.

Significant upzoning in the Northgate Urban Center cannot be accomplished correctly without coordination of all these efforts. The Northgate Neighborhood Plan was created in 1993. While it provides a workable framework for many things, important sections of it were gutted to facilitate the Thornton Place developments. It also does not take into consideration the 2021 arrival of LINK light rail.

Our primary desire is to have the Northgate Neighborhood Plan redone using the bottom-up planning process of the 1990s. Alternatively, the jurisdictions involved in transportation and development decision within the Northgate Urban Center should endeavor to create a framework where plans are developed simultaneously, with neighborhood groups like the Maple Leaf Community Council at the table.

Public safety: A Transit Police/SPD Substation

We encourage Sound Transit and King County Metro to consider placing a Transit Police substation at the Northgate Transit Center/LINK station. This should not be difficult given the design of these areas has

not been finalized. Having transit-specific public safety staff on hand at what we expect will be one of the busiest stations on the North Link segment makes sense.

We already have crime issues at Northgate, particularly youth crime. Much of this crime occurs in the Northgate Urban Center and a significant portion occurs in areas related to transit. We strongly believe this must be prospectively addressed by all parties as we work to increase employment and residential zoned capacity in the area.

New development in the Northgate Urban Center will bring tens of thousands of new people to the area. Our public safety infrastructure in north Seattle is already stressed. Growth in the number of retirement homes has increased calls for the Seattle Fire Department. Growth in residents will increase calls for assistance from the Seattle Police Department.

We are also aware the Seattle Police Department is looking for a new location for the North Precinct. We encourage the City of Seattle to consider locating this at Northgate, or at least a sub-station at Northgate. The Maple Leaf Community Council is on record as being supportive of community policing, and this public safety strategy would be energized in the Northgate Urban Center by having a place to base our officers.

Affordable housing is a requirement

The Northgate Urban Center has a significant retail employment component. We strongly believe development in the Northgate Urban Center should be affordable to the average retail worker employed in the area.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Addendum for part of the Northgate Urban Center was published by DPD in November 2011. It notes there are a significant number of affordable housing units that will be demolished to make way for proposed development. The monthly rental cost of this existing housing is actually below that affordable by households earning 50% of Adjusted Median Income (AMI) according to the EIS Addendum.

A primary reason we are willing to urge significant upzones for the Northgate Urban Center is to accommodate a significant number of new affordable units. The proximity of the Northgate LINK station and public ownership of developable parcels in the area provides an ideal opportunity to create truly affordable housing in this area.

Since “affordable” has been defined different ways across the city, we wish to be very clear. We do not consider unit rents at 80% of AMI to be “affordable” for this primarily retail employment area. Even in the current hot rental market, it is easy to find rental units across Seattle cheaper than those allowed by 80% AMI standards.

“Affordable development” for the Northgate Urban Center should mean two things: First, a minimum of 1:1 replacement for existing units currently renting below 50% of AMI. Second, we want to see a significant number of new units affordable at the median income of retail workers actually working in the Northgate Urban Center. We are aware a prospective salary survey may be required to adequately calculate the median income of employees in the area, but we strongly believe this is important.

Additionally, we want to point out units as affordable as those in the Northgate Urban Center slated to be demolished are not easily found in Seattle. Residents displaced from this area are likely to need relocation assistance. We ask King County and City of Seattle affordable housing officials to plan for this and engage affected residents as soon as possible. We also ask the time between demolition and availability of the newly constructed affordable units be minimized. Seattle's DPD can help accomplish this by not issuing a demolition permit until all permits for the new structures are ready to go and the developer is ready to begin work on the entire project.

Adding hundreds of new units in the Northgate Urban Center at a cost unaffordable to those working in the Northgate Urban Center is unacceptable. Therefore, the Maple Leaf Community Council will have a difficult time supporting any new upzones without provisions to meet the "affordable development" standards we outline above. We have a unique and special opportunity to create an honest, affordable live here/work here environment in the Northgate Urban Center and we shouldn't pass on this opportunity.

LINK station development

Both the LINK station and the Northgate Transit Center area should, at the very least, integrate small business spaces into the final design. This is common in other, similar transportation centers around the country. There is no reason we cannot be similarly creative in Seattle.

Additionally, we should work to find ways to incorporate residential units into the air space above the station and transit center. People live and work above portions of LINK routes and bus routes throughout Seattle already. We should endeavor to create similar opportunities in the Northgate Urban Center.

At the very least, routing of LINK and bus traffic should be rationalized to the smallest space possible. This leaves the maximum space possible for residential and small business uses.

Adequate step-downs

Seattle's Comprehensive Plan and Land use code requires adequate step-downs from more dense uses to less dense uses. When we presented the items contained in this letter to our community at a recent meeting, adequate step-downs were a major area of concern. The Maple Leaf Community Council, when advocating for even more residential and employment zoning capacity than currently envisioned in the Northgate Urban Center, expects this design principle to be honored.

There are heights at the edges of the Northgate Urban Center we would find inappropriate given adjacent zoning. One reason why comprehensive area planning is required is to analyze where heights can and cannot be significantly increased over the current zoning. Successfully maintaining quality of life while increasing zoning capacity requires adequate step-downs are maintained.

Green infrastructure

Much of the Northgate Urban Center has already lost its urban forest canopy. As we've seen during the design of parking areas at Northgate Mall, this does not have to be a permanent condition. The whole point of increased density is to improve the environment. Design guidelines and other policies should reflect solid commitments to green infrastructure.

Of particular concern is significant areas of currently permeable surface likely to be lost as some parcels in the area are redeveloped. The use of conifers instead of deciduous trees and purposeful incorporation of stormwater handling elements into the design infrastructure are necessary to mitigate this significant adverse environmental impact.

We would also be remiss to not mention our support for new opportunities to daylight additional portions of Thornton Creek. We encourage all parties involved in development decisions in the Northgate Urban Center to proactively reach out to the Thornton Watershed Oversight Council to gain their input. We note the leadership of Thornton Creek activists on this issue resulted in award-winning developments at Thornton Place, so they have an established track record of success in this area.

Transportation issues

The transportation infrastructure for the current land uses in the Northgate Urban Center is inadequate. Intersections are regularly scored at Level of Service (LOS) ‘D’ or worse. The currently-contemplated upzones will worsen conditions. To achieve the even higher densities we believe are possible in the Northgate Urban Center significant investment in transportation infrastructure must take place.

If the increased residential unit density is affordably priced and intelligently sited, LINK light rail will go a long way towards addressing the lack of transportation infrastructure in the Northgate Urban Center and surrounding areas. It cannot address all the issues, however.

Above all, the Northgate Comprehensive Transportation Improvement Plan (CTIP) must be revised and modernized. All jurisdictions involved in developments in the Northgate Urban Center – Sound Transit, King County, WSDOT, and the City of Seattle – need to work with the area’s neighborhood organizations (including the Maple Leaf Community Council) to update this document and adequately plan transportation infrastructure to handle the increased densities in the area.

Specific mechanism to fund improvements

We want to be very clear: Without adequate transportation improvements accompanied by prospectively-defined funding sources, the Maple Leaf Community Council does **not** and will not support significant additional upzoning in the Northgate Urban Center.

Development of the Northgate Urban Center will add substantial density. Much of this will be accomplished via upzones – and preferably via contract upzones. The Washington State Growth Management Act is very clear on how increased density should pay for, and concurrently arrive with, infrastructure improvements. We strongly believe in the Growth Management Act’s requirements for concurrency.

DPD has previously relied, with very little success in this area, on “voluntary” contributions to address certain transportation funding issues. We believe a Local Improvement District and/or Impact Fees are a necessary component of proper development in the Northgate Urban Center.

One of the problems with the Northgate CTIP was the lack of prospective identification of funding for items. We want to make sure that does not happen again with this new round of density increases.

First Avenue NE Greenway

Maple Leaf's hilly geography is tough on pedestrians and cyclists. This geography represents a barrier between northeast Seattle and the rest of the city. Since Northgate will be the northern Seattle terminus of LINK, specific strategies are required to get pedestrians and cyclists from the LINK station to points south.

First Avenue NE is the most gradually-sloped north/south street in our neighborhood. Running parallel to I-5 and the LINK rail route, the western side of the street offers considerable right of way space. The roadway is wide and speeds on it have been enough of a problem that SDOT has installed speed bumps south of NE 92nd Street.

This street, therefore, represents an ideal location for a pedestrian greenway. The relatively gentle slope makes it the easiest cycle route south. After curving at NE 85th Street, this route heads directly to the bicycle lanes on Roosevelt Way NE and the Maple Leaf Reservoir Park.

Specific plans for greenway elements should be incorporated into Sound Transit's LINK routing and construction documents. SDOT should work with the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to secure right-of-way access to build greenway elements along this roadway. SDOT should reach out immediately to residents along NE 85th Street between First Avenue NE and Roosevelt Way NE to determine how greenway elements could be extended on that narrower side street. (The Maple Leaf Community Council is happy to facilitate those discussions, of course.)

As part of the greenway design, we request SDOT seriously examine cycle-lift technology currently in use in places like Trondheim, Norway. The Trampe lift system (<http://www.trampe.no/english/>) could be used on the steepest section of the proposed greenway. While we were initially skeptical about this technology and how many users it might generate, updated data from Trondheim shows both the concept and the technology deserve investigation and discussion. If cycle-assist technology is deemed not feasible, we will understand that decision. The important thing here is the creation of the greenway. Implementation of cycle-assist technology in the greenway would be icing on the cake.

Sidewalks

Most of Maple Leaf north of NE 92nd Street does not have sidewalks. Transit ridership data show people are willing to walk about 1/4 to 1/2 mile to access transit. These data assume adequate pedestrian infrastructure exists, which it does not in this area of Maple Leaf.

It is vital that we fund sidewalks on all side streets within the 1/4 to 1/2 mile walking area. The installation of staircases on the particularly steep streets leading into the Maple Leaf neighborhood should also be included in the plan. Additionally, we need to make certain there are safe routes to the LINK station and transit center from area schools. It is of particular interest to Maple Leaf that sidewalk funding be included in a transportation improvement plan created in advance of development.

Pedestrian bridge (not a parking garage)

The federal government's grants for transportation infrastructure improvements in the Northgate Urban Center area are accompanied by a parking requirement. The Maple Leaf Community Council opposes

plans for King County Metro or Sound Transit to construct a new parking garage at Northgate to satisfy these requirements. Our letter dated January 19, 2011 outlines our objections in this area in more detail.

Northgate will be the northern terminus of LINK for two years until the Mountlake Terrace station is complete. According to recent studies, most private vehicle traffic to the current Northgate Transit Center arrives from Seattle neighborhoods to the north of the Northgate Urban Center. While we have specific concerns related to the likely increase in park-and-dash riders when LINK opens, we feel these problems are of relatively short-term duration and addressable in ways other than building a new garage.

Instead, we strongly advocate for a pedestrian and cycling bridge over I-5 to North Seattle Community College (NSCC). The spare daytime parking at NSCC can be used to fulfill the federal requirements. WSDOT is supportive of a bridge over I-5 (they want to hang signs off it) and preliminary costs indicate the bridge is no more expensive than a garage.

The pedestrian bridge would provide a critical east/west connection to LINK. Ridership would increase given the easy access to NSCC and Northwest Hospital. Costs to improve pedestrian safety on First Avenue NE north from the transit center then west under the freeway at Northgate Way would be reduced.

A pedestrian bridge is the right **long-term** investment. The Maple Leaf Community Council has long supported reconnecting neighborhoods across I-5. We believe the solution of a bridge should be explored with all due haste with NSCC, businesses in the area, and other affected neighborhoods.

Protecting non-arterials

Northeast Northgate Way is already overburdened due to existing density. It is a major east/west connecting arterial, and the only one between NE 80th Street and NE 125th Street. Much of the growth in the Northgate Urban Center, however, is adjacent or nearly adjacent to this arterial. Planning for ingress and egress to individual developments adjacent to NE Northgate Way poses interesting and significant traffic management problems.

It is important to ensure increased zoning capacity in the Northgate Urban Center does not turn our non-arterials into *de facto* arterials. A very good Maple Leaf example is the pressure some currently proposed developments will place on 8th Avenue NE. While still in the Early Design Guidance stage, a 238-unit multi use development (525 NE Northgate Way, DPD #3012842) apparently plans to use 8th Ave NE for traffic ingress and egress. This is a highly inappropriate use of a non-arterial street and careful conditioning will be required to mitigate this potential significant adverse environmental harm.

The Maple Leaf Community Council is encouraging more residential and employment zoned capacity in the Northgate Urban Center than is currently contemplated. We're doing so because we believe the increased zoned capacity can be done in a way that maximizes the unique potential of this area while minimizing the adverse impacts and nearby residential areas of our neighborhood.

Failing to eliminate heavy use of Maple Leaf's north/south and east/west non-arterials would be a showstopper for us. All plans from Sound Transit, King County, and the City of Seattle for changes to transportation infrastructure and zoning **must** be accompanied with **funded** implementations of strategies to eliminate heavy use of non-arterials in the area.

Pass-through traffic reduction measures

When discussing this letter with our community, multiple residents voiced concern of the impact of additional density on our north/south arterials (5th Avenue NE, Roosevelt Way NE, and 15th Avenue NE). While we all *hope* the presence of LINK and the transit center will reduce vehicle trips, long experience tells us this mass transit infrastructure will not eliminate growth in vehicular traffic.

None of our north/south arterials were built to handle significant traffic. Each is only one lane in either direction with no turn lanes. Each is bordered by residential structures. None currently has adequate pedestrian infrastructure, and that absence of infrastructure will only become more apparent with increased vehicular traffic.

Further, there is very little need for Northgate Urban Center traffic to move south into Maple Leaf except to take advantage of shopping and dining opportunities. There is a major freeway interchange in the Northgate Urban Center. There is a main east/west corridor (NE Northgate Way) in the area. Mass transit modalities can get residents to/from main travel generators of the University of Washington campus and downtown Seattle.

Therefore, we want to proactively explore strategies to reduce traffic flowing south into the Maple Leaf Community. We do not have all the answers in this regard, but we hope to work with all involved in order to create new strategies to address this issue. We do know for certain this potentially significant adverse environmental impact will not take care of itself or be adequately mitigated simply by the presence of LINK and the Northgate Transit Center. There needs to be a well thought out plan to deal with this.

Short term Residential Parking Zones

Parking demand at the Northgate Transit Center already exceeds the supply. Businesses and residents in NW Maple Leaf have expressed their concern with park-and-dash transit riders. We believe this problem will worsen when LINK construction begins and only increase when LINK arrives – particularly during the two years where Northgate is the northern terminus for the LINK line.

We strongly recommend exploring a short-term, subsidized Residential Parking Zone (RPZ) covering residential areas in NW Maple Leaf. To facilitate this, we request a community outreach process commence as soon as possible given construction activity will soon begin to eliminate transit center parking availability. We further request SDOT and Sound Transit make a special effort to work with the tenants of the commercial properties in NW Maple Leaf to gather opinions concerning an RPZ in their areas. The Maple Leaf Community Council is happy to help facilitate these conversations to keep costs down and increase participation.

We believe the need for a RPZ will be short term, which is why we are only asking for a short-term subsidy. Once the Mountlake Terrace station opens, and Metro successfully rationalizes feeder routes from neighborhoods north of the Northgate Urban Center, excess demand for parking should be reduced. The duration of the subsidized RPZ should be sufficient to cover the time until the data show the Mountlake Terrace station opening and Metro feeder route rationalization has reduced parking demand enough so transit user overflow into NW Maple Leaf is not an issue.

Vibration and noise

The latest plans for LINK routing have the line underground through part of the Maple Leaf neighborhood to a portal at NE 94th Street. The remainder runs along the I-5 right-of-way along First Avenue NE. We want to ensure noise and vibrations are minimized during construction and after the line is open.

Ground vibrations have recently become an issue for homeowners and businesses above LINK tunnel construction. Early reports are this is an issue with trains removing excavated material. We would like to have Sound Transit brief the Maple Leaf Community Council and affected neighbors on what steps are being taken to eliminate this problem during construction of the LINK line under Maple Leaf.

As predicted in advance by neighborhood organizations in southeast Seattle, LINK's operating noise levels are unacceptably high. Sound Transit continues to work on strategies to get noise levels below acceptable levels. In Maple Leaf, most of the LINK route along I-5 has noise walls already present. The Maple Leaf Community Council worked with WSDOT to install noise walls of a type that are removable during LINK construction and reusable afterwards. Keeping in mind our desire for a Greenway along First Avenue NE, we want to work with Sound Transit to determine whether the noise walls can be used to shield Maple Leaf residents from noise *during* construction. We also would like to discuss placement of the sound walls and any additional sound walls that may prove necessary after the LINK line is complete to reduce noise during operation.

We are happy to work with Sound Transit to facilitate meetings with the community and affected residents on these issues. When we presented to our community, this was an area of major concern so we want to be proactive in addressing this.

Freight Mobility

SDOT is planning to develop a Seattle Freight Mobility Master Plan. This document is necessary to adequately address commercial uses of our city's transportation infrastructure. We request the Northgate Urban Center be included in the Freight Mobility Master Plan.

The Northgate Urban Center is a significant destination and source of freight traffic. Dozens of new businesses, largely retail and food service businesses, will arrive with the increased density in the Northgate Urban Center. Further, as more and more businesses eliminate on-site inventory and move to just-in-time deliveries, freight traffic will only increase in this area. We must incorporate freight mobility planning into the rest of the Northgate Urban Center's transportation planning. The best way to do that is have the Northgate Urban Center area included in the Freight Mobility Master Plan.

Conclusions

The Maple Leaf Community Council has been representing our community for over 25 years. We know our neighborhood well, we're elected by our residents to represent them, and we have been specifically involved in Northgate transportation and land use issues for most of two decades.

Advocating for significant **additional** density in the Northgate Urban Center is a position we did not undertake lightly, particularly after watching what has occurred in the Roosevelt neighborhood and

elsewhere in the city. We have taken this position because we understand to make the Urban Center approach to concentrated growth in Seattle work, we have to grow larger in the Northgate Urban Center.

If we cannot accomplish this in the Northgate Urban Center, where can we accomplish it?

We do not agree with uncoordinated upzones in the area, however. This letter has attempted to communicate our views on how additional residential and employment zoned capacity can be accomplished while preserving the quality of life in Maple Leaf and the Northgate Urban Center. We did not, despite the length of this letter, attempt to outline *everything* we see as necessary. Instead, this is our attempt to lay out a framework for further discussion and call your attention to issues of concern to the Maple Leaf neighborhood.

Above all, we look forward open lines of communication and close cooperation with all of you concerning land use and transportation changes coming to the Northgate Urban Center. Please feel free to share this letter with anyone in your organization.

Sincerely,

/sig/

David Miller
Chair, Land Use & Transportation Subcommittee
Maple Leaf Community Council

/sig/

Joshua Newman
President
Maple Leaf Community Council

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Seattle Design Commission Chair Julie Bassuk
Pinehurst Community Council
Haller Lake Community Club
Thornton Creek Watershed Oversight Council
Thornton Creek Alliance

